



EMPIRE MAGAZINE STATEMENT  
LORESSA CLISBY  
DIGITAL ARTIST  
DATE UNKNOWN, LIKELY 2012



I worked for Threshold remotely from Australia in the early 2000's after meeting Larry Kasanoff and Alison Savitch in LA in 1998. The meeting was pleasant and Alison was excited.

Initially, I started working with Alison at the time, making 3D models for their production of Mortal Kombat TV series. I then formed the company Digital Artisan with Michael Darren, and progressed with making short Flash animations for Threshold. I acted as Animation Director and had also developed the naming and filing convention for our company, and programmed up a file server called "The Trunk" we used for years between DA and Threshold.

Then Threshold announced they were making Foodfight! and they were hiring. We moved to LA and I started in early 2006.

When I first started, I was in shock of my immediate treatment by Larry. He treated all new recruits like they were worth nothing and knew nothing, and many people would leave after just 2 weeks of working there. Other people were fired for the most petty and ridiculous reasons, but mainly because Larry could not understand why they were there and what their value to the production was.

Why didn't I leave? Well, I was working via a work visa from Australia. I had to be sponsored by a US company to work for them. If I was fired, or left my job, I had 10 days to find a new company to sponsor me to work or I had to leave the country. So, I stuck it out for a year.

The studio exterior was grey and totally nondescript looking. Inside, the foyer was white and had posters on the walls of the films Larry had done in the past. There was also a great display of Arnold Schwarzenegger's bullet hole riddled leather jacket from Terminator, and a huge background painting from Mortal Kombat. There was also a very bold blue and white couch. This colour preference becomes significant later.

Past the foyer was the studio space, with desks and chairs to accommodate around 100 artists. The walls were painted black and there was only minimalistic lighting, so it had the feeling of being inside a huge cavern or even dungeon. This was accentuated by huge ominous monster statue props from the Mortal Kombat films that stood about the place. It was also always cold



inside. I guess to keep the computers and render farm cool, but we literally had to bring winter woollens to work during summer, it was that cold.

Beyond the studio was a fully equipped single bedroom upstairs apartment, and an outside parking space for a couple of cars. Workers had to find their own parking in the street, and cyclists could park on the lot, but only behind the cars, so had to carry their bikes over the cars.

Initially they hadn't started doing much and there were really only around 6 of us, with the previous artists who had started on the original fully animated film (before the drives were stolen) moving out.

The film was initially self financed using 'sued money'. LK had recently won a case, suing WB for using MK of which he still retained the rights. Rumours were, the amount was around \$2 million. I began with doing odd jobs including designing website material, working on short animations and also the monumental task of cleaning up and organizing the remaining drives and formulating a naming convention for the production to work with. This was to the annoyance of Larry who didn't understand how important it was to have a good filing system and naming convention. He demanded to know what my value was, but since I'd been working with the producer for some years, and he knew the value I had as an artist he 'protected' me from Larry's scourge.

Larry always claimed he 'loved' animation, yet he really knew nothing about it. Although his training was in business school, when asked why do an animation, he replied "I like animation". His background was live action, so when it came to making Foodfight! (again) he learned about motion capture, and found through this method, he could create an 'animated movie' and formally took control as Director. Previously, I believe the control was in the hands of the Producer who through TDRL successfully attempted to animate Foodfight! in the vane of Warner Brothers cartoons. Kasanoff is known as a 'dealmaker', not a director, and certainly not an animated movie director.

With the focus on motion capture, we set up the studio to model and rig characters so they could be animated by actors and performers in another motion capture studio. I, along with others were assigned to fix the problems associated with it - where character heads and limbs would intersect with other characters, or the speed was wrong or the animated movement wasn't broad enough. I had to learn how to do this quick smart as Larry was very impatient. Fortunately, I had a background in animation and camera work, so I found the work quite easy and became very good at it.

I also was assigned the role of Script Supervisor. I'm not sure why they chose me, but I had done some screenwriting courses and had written a couple of scripts, so I did know a bit about



writing. I was very critical of the script. Aside from clearly missing the mark on the kid market it was supposed to be aimed for - with sexual innuendo and smut throughout, there was the major problem of the disappearance of one of the lead characters - Sunshine Goodness. She just disappeared and you didn't see her again till near the end. So, you pretty much forgot about her, then she suddenly shows up and defeats the antagonist.

I attended the motion capture studio to work with Larry and the actors on scenes they had to play out. Actors would 'act out' the scenes and the cameras and computers would 'capture' their motion and transfer it to the CG character 'skeleton' rigs. The characters would assume the movement, thus giving the illusion it was animated. However, because the faces had not yet been captured, they literally looked like people acting inside animal suits.

Life working at Threshold was truly bizarre.

Larry had an old black dog he had had for a long time. You could see he loved her very much and she was with him all day in his office. She was quiet and obedient. He then bought another very large brown dog during production called Monkey Del Monté. He did not like Monkey nearly as much, and didn't seem to have any ability to train him. When Monkey bounded out from Larry's office, he would immediately go looking for food, and if you had your lunch somewhere reachable or any scrap of food on your desk, it was gobbled up immediately. Monkey was around. People would go get a coffee and come back to no lunch! Monkey was also not toilet trained. He would poop anywhere he went, and often in the middle of the gangway. Larry completely ignored this and it was always up to whoever was most annoyed by this to clean it up, unless Larry would order someone to do so. Mostly all Larry would do would scold Monkey, then he'd just walk off. Sometimes you'd hear him yelling at Monkey but the silly dog never paid any attention to him.

Several times per week Larry would casually walk through the studio towards the apartment at the back followed by a girl. It was always a different girl, and always a very pretty girl. We all knew what was going on but nobody ever said anything. He advertised in the trade magazines or via agents that he was casting for someone to play the 'major female role' in his next feature film - sometimes Duke Nukem or the next Mortal Kombat movie. The women would be advised to bring along their bikinis. He would then take them to the apartment where they had a camera set up in a room. Wearing bikinis, the women would be 'interviewed' by him. But his questions never related to the role, they were always personal and sexual. The session was recorded and he would get the editor to edit the interview and send it direct to him. The tapes would disappear into his collection and the girls never got a call back. He was also always actually looking for a girlfriend, and I remember he finally got one, with model looks of course. He did make some of them into internet shorts called Bikini Masterpiece Theatre. I remember leaving for lunch just after a girl had gone through and I spotted her in the street. She got into her piece of shit car and left. I was so angry since I knew she'd never get the call back and just gave him her body for nothing.



Another strange thing - Larry seemed to be obsessed with Lady X - the antagonist character in the movie. He was very focused on what she had to wear and how she moved. She was always kicking her legs up and you could almost see up her dress in many shots. Then one day I spotted him looking at a rendered shot of her, it was like he was actually attracted to her. As I watched I heard him utter softly to himself "Mmm, Lady X... Lady X". He was in LOVE with her! I then found another rendered image which was not meant to go into the film. It was clearly rendered for HIM. (See attached)

He was also obsessed with the colour blue. Not just any blue, but chroma-key blue. He wore it nearly every day and that couch was the exact same colour. One day, he said he wanted to re-paint the entire building. He had me render up a virtual image of the building - in chroma-key blue of course.

He also always had good looking female assistants. But they never lasted very long, until he got one who was very smart - and she lasted. She knew exactly what to do to keep him calm. I remember him getting irritated in the edit suite, and she said to me she knew what to do and gave him a big tub of chocolate ice cream. It worked a treat!

There was always speculation about whether he had some sort of mental disorder, so one day I looked it up online. I found one that fitted him like a glove, in fact he had 8 out of the 11 symptoms. Sociopath. Almost certainly undiagnosed.

Many times during production they had 'tours' for potential investors through the building. We had to be on our best behaviour and look busy during this time. They had tours pretty much every week, taking people around the studio, boasting and lying to them about the movie and its 'technology' They were always saying they would be the next Pixar and that this movie was like Toy Story. They would also boast about how they were innovators in mo-cap technology, when clearly they weren't as it had already been employed with greater success in completed movies like Happy Feet, Monster House and The Polar Express, use as 'digital doubles' in films like Lord of the Rings, as well as numerous realistic first person shooter games. They also boasted about how the 'brands' would make the film pay for itself 'millions of times over' with commercial tie ins.

One such tour was with a big name film distribution company (Paramount or Universal). I remember them coming out of the meeting with Larry and co, and they came straight to our desks and said they wanted to ask us what we thought of the production because they didn't believe what they were told by management. I among the others didn't hold back - we told them exactly what was going on. Lest to say, they didn't invest in the film.



I had a very good relationship with one of the Producers. We used to chat about daily goings-ons and mainly about what had to be done. Much of my role in the company was orchestrated through this guy. He said they had a recent influx of money, I believe it was \$15M, but Larry had just skimmed \$5M off the top, leaving the rest for the production. He immediately was looking for a house to buy, because he had been renting a house in Pacific Palisades. But, even with \$5M in 2006, he couldn't find anything! (He lived alone with his 2 dogs incidentally) So, he ended up renting a house in Malibu for \$16K/month. I knew artists that had been working at the studio for many years before me, and I was shocked at how little they were being paid. They had never gotten a raise. They had asked and were always refused.

We had to re-do things in every different way possible, and give him so many different designs it was crazy. What I realized was that Larry didn't actually KNOW what he wanted. He had to be shown many versions till he liked something. One of the designers even went back and showed him OLD stuff again which he would sometimes choose, saying "This is it!" He would say things like "I need it to be 30% better." Other times he would say "Just make it awesome." WTF??? I remember after he had seen a character's costume, he was focused on the stitching texture of the cuffs. He didn't like it, so he told them to make it double stitched, then changed his mind and told them it had to be triple stitched! He micro-managed everyone and it was always spontaneous, unpredictable and entirely selfish and with no concern about anyone else. We never knew what he wanted us to work on next, never knew when the next review would be, or if what we'd done was final, or had to be totally re-done. We often had to work late into the night and could only stop when he decided to leave for the day.

Normally, we would make lower resolution models for background characters or props to iotunuze the scene and save on render time. Render time was important. A single frame of animation could take hours to render - and this would amount to more money spent. We had to make ALL the models high resolution in case he would want to track right into a character's face from a huge distance away at any time. He simply had no concept of the technicalities of CG animation. He said he loved the freedom from being able to move the virtual 'camera' anywhere he wanted but because he didn't understand cinematic rules, camera moves he wanted were simply ridiculous or impossible looking and often gut-churning when we played them on the huge screen.

One day one of the ex-Producers turned up and we heard a commotion in the foyer. It turns out that Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator costume display wasn't Larry's and the ex-producer had turned up to collect it. There was some shouting, then some guy came in and wrestled it off the wall and they ran out with it. Larry ordered people to chase them down. They jumped into a big 4x4 and nearly ran over their pursuers. My guess is he'd had a falling out with the producer initially.

The place was in a shambles. There were old computers and equipment stacked in corners, the storage room was filled with old scripts, books and documents and the file system was backed



up several times over with cryptic naming conventions throughout. I attempted to sort the system out, but it was just too much work for just one person, so I left it and started something new. Before the production ramped up, we decided to clean out that room and repaint the walls blue. It was absolutely filthy and we found several dead rats in amongst the old computers.

When we were cleaning out the store room, we came across an old laptop. We got it going and it didn't have a password and all the files were still inside it. Turns out it was Larry's old laptop. I checked his contact list and it was literally filled with lawyers and hardly any friends, apart from his brother and some woman he claimed as his mentor.

Every day, I dreaded working with Larry, until I didn't. Initially I was treated like I knew nothing, that he knew everything and that everything I did was wrong. The more I got used to this treatment and the better I got at what I did, the more I rebelled. He used to tell me what I did wasn't correct and to do it again, and again, and again. I developed a very good understanding of the software I used, so I started to argue with him, telling him it wouldn't work. He would still challenge me, so I'd tell him I'd do it and show him that it doesn't work. He started to realize I knew what I was talking about, and when he saw I really did have value, he started to treat me with more respect. In fact one day, they asked me to the office and asked me if I wanted to be a CG supervisor. I was honoured but realized it meant I'd have to be working directly with Larry every day, so I declined. I'm still glad I did, because the person who did get the job eventually had a mental breakdown.

Just over a year later, I resigned. The producer I was working with was also leaving and he took a bunch of us with him to start a new company, so I could arrange for sponsorship. The producer told me Larry was looking for his replacement and had already contacted his friends to see if they would take his job. Then we heard, unsurprisingly, Larry's brother was going to replace him.

Amazingly for me however, Larry came up to me and told me he was sorry to hear I was leaving and thanked me for the work I'd done. I had never heard him say this to anyone else. Normally people would just resign and leave the day they resigned in fear of the wrath of Larry, and I did this too, but to my utter amazement he wasn't angry.